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AUTHOR Cross, K. Patricia
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ABSTRACT

Given today's rapid pace of change in knowledge and lifestyles and the resultant obsolescence of an individual's education shortly after graduation, community college's must plan for and help promote the emergence of a learning society. Basic to the concept of lifelong learning are: (1) the restructuring of the entire educational system to develop and encourage lifelong learners in their first years of school; (2) the utilization of businesses and other non-academic organizations as resources in the learning process; and (3) the increased responsibility on the part of stuients for self-directed learning. The accomplishment of these goals requires that special efforts, including adult career counseling, equity in financial aid, and more job-relevant education, be employed to help those economically and educationally disadvantaged students whose past negative experiences with the educational system discourage their participation in adult learning. In addition, colleges must abandon the self-serving view of adult education as a means of protecting jobs and concentrate on providing students with an understanding of themselves as learners, of the need for lifelong learning, and of the methods of selecting from the educational options available to them. These efforts will increase the pool of sophisticated consumers of education and challenge the educational system to achieve high levels of production and quality. (JP)

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# RESPONDING TO LEARNING NEEDS IN THE 1980s

K. Patricia Cross

Distinguished Research Scientist
Educational Testing Service

The beginning of a new decade always provides a good excuse to assess the past and plan for the future. I'm not going to do much assessment of the past, except to observe that the 1980s will be as different from the 1970s as the 1970s were from the 1960s. If you will remember, the 1960s ended with considerable student dissention and confrontation. But despite the attention given to dissension on the campuses, the dissension of the 1960s was probably more constructive than destructive in uniting campuses in a common cause. It was the kind of dissension that generated high energy, optimism, and feelings of power to change things.

Today, just one short decade later, the campus climate across the nation is almost the opposite. While there is still dissension, it is divisive rather than unifying, directed not toward a common external enemy, but toward one's fellow educators, on and off campus. There is growing competition among institutions for students, departments for funds, and teachers for jobs. Moreover, almost suddenly it seems, campuses have

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changed from playing the role of social critics on significant issues such as civil rights and the war in Viet Nam to being the object of social criticism on a wide variety of issues, ranging from student loan defaults to the ethics of football coaches to the quality of teaching and learning.

I point out the dramatic differences in campus climate between the end of the 1960s and the end of the 1970s, not to depress you, but rather to advance the thesis that the end of the 1980s may be startlingly different from the beginning of this decade. Personally, I think that living with the coming changes in higher education will be considerably more pleasant than anticipating them, and that the 1980s will end on a high note as higher education begins to find its new role in the learning society. Because I view the 1980s not as a time of temporary setback for higher education but as a time for serious transition, I want to spend some time talking about the learning society and the role of institutionalized education in it.

There are a number of factors contributing to the growth of the learning society. The most obvious is the escalation of the rate of change itself. Margaret Mead once observed that the world in which we live is not the world we were born in nor is it the world in which we will die. In the world I was born into, for example, the average citizen had no experience with television, commercial airplane travel, credit cards, computers, or frozen foods. Generations used to change faster than the world about them, and thus parents and teachers could pass along to the new generation the lessons they needed to know to get along in the world. Now, however, the world changes faster than the generations, and it is clear that no education will last a lifetime. The rate of change is so rapid in many academic disciplines that professional

obsolescence can be measured in terms of half-life, a measure borrowed from nuclear physics. The half-life of a professional's competence is the time after completion of professional training when, because of new developments, practicing professionals become roughly half as competent as they were upon graduation. The growth of new knowledge in medicine has been so rapid, for example, that the half-life of physicians is estimated at about five years. In my own field of psychology, it is thought to be about ten years (Dubin, 1972). I don't know what it is in education administration, but there is almost no overlap betweeen what we worried about ten years ago and what we worry about today.

. The rapid pace of change raises new questions about the purpose of undergraduate education. How can we reduce the time lag between what the teacher knows ten years out of graduate school and what the student needs to know? One study estimated that a compulsive, well read teacher of engineering psychology would need to read 40 articles and books a day to keep up with current knowledge--and the literature of psychology is not nearly as voluminous as that in chemistry or biology (Dubin, 1972). The incredible explosion of knowledge also makes it difficult to find agreement on just what content a student needs to know. In the transition-of-knowledge perception of education, there is the question of whether to develop generalists who know less and less about more and more, or specialists who know more and more about less and less.

Lifestyles in American society seem to be changing as fast as knowledge. We are moving away from the "linear lifeplan" in which education is for the young, work for the middle aged, and enforced leisure for the elderly, toward a blended lifeplan in which education, work, and leisure

go on concurrently throughout life. So far in history, there has been a pronounced tendency to increase the separation between education, work, and leisure by keeping young people in school and off the labor market and by forcing older persons into ever-earlier retirement (Best & Stern, 1976). But now there seems to be growing dissatisfaction on the part of almost everyone with this formula for protecting jobs for the middle years of life. Sociologists are observing the rise of what has been called "rights consciousness" or the "psychology of entitlement." Today almost everyone feels entitled to a job. At the same time, almost everyone feels entitled to education and to full enjoyment of their leisure hours. Older people have insisted upon their right to work if they want to, and Congress has endorsed that right through a roll-back of mandatory retirement. Young people are showing increasing dissatisfaction with long years of uninterrupted schooling, especially when there is no guarantee of the well-paid and meaningful job to which they feel entitled at the other end of the educational pipeline. There has been a steady increase in the number of students exercising their right to a job. But who needs to tell community college educators that Joe College is an endangered species, perhaps already extinct on most community college campuses.

At the same time that there is a blending of life activities for individuals, there is a blending of function among the organizations of society. Schools no longer have a monopoly on education, nor do businesses tend strictly to business. Employers are increasingly into education, conducting on-the-job training for employees, workshops for professionals, and thinktanks for executives. Travel agencies are adding educational

components to packaged tours at the same time that alumni offices and university extension services are adding packaged tours to credit bearing courses. Community colleges would appear to be in the right place at the right time with the right mission to cooperate with other educational providers in the community. Whether they will move gracefully into the role envisaged by Ed Glaezer as the community's college remains to be seen. In recent data from ETS's Community College Goals Inventory, I was surprised to find the goals of lifelong learning and the provision of community services ranked quite low in the priorities of community colleges today, exceeded by more pressing, pragmatic concerns such as accountability and effective management (Cross, in press).

Those are admittedly critical matters, but one can hope that even under today's relentless pressures to improve efficiency, community colleges will not lose sight of the vision that has been so characteristic of them to date.

Much of the vision of the worldwide learning society has been provided by UNESCO. At their General Assembly in 1976, they maintained that lifelong learning is,

> ". . . an overall scheme aimed both at restructuring the existing education system and at developing the entire educational potential outside the education system; in such a scheme men and women are the agent of their own education. . . ."

That definition contains three basic ideas about the nature of lifelong learning: One is that the entire formal educational system, from elementary school through graduate school, should be restructured to develop lifelong learners. Second, the UNESCO statement makes clear that it is not just schools and colleges that are to serve as the targets for improved education. Rather, the world is full of people, organizations, and other learning resources that can be marshalled in behalf of lifelong learning. Third, this definition stresses the importance of helping people become self-directed learners, the active agents of their own education.

We in the United States tend to take a more limited view of lifelong learning. Despite lip service to the idea that lifelong learning includes cradle to the grave learning, we rarely think of the lifelong learning movement as a call for the reform of elementary education. Yet, it is becoming increasingly apparent that the education of the lifelong learner must begin very early. We are quite unlikely to develop a lifelong learner through trying to entice an adult who hated school as a youngster back into the classroom.

Survey research is unanimous in concluding that the single most important predictor of whether an adult will engage in further education is past level of educational attainment (Cross, 1979). Learning is addictive; the more education people have, the more they want and the more they take advantage of available opportunities. A high school graduate is three times as likely as an elementary school graduate to participate in adult education, and a college graduate is twice as likely as a high school graduate to be engaged in educational activities as an adult (Cross, 1979).

There is good news and bad news in those statistics. The good news is that we are quite unlikely to run out of people to educate. Almost anything that any college or other educational provider does to educate people stimulates rather than satiates the market. An excellent example of such stimulation exists in the impact of Roots on the educational resources of the society. Not only did this nationally televised course in black history result in increased registration in formal courses in history, slavery, and anthropology, but records bureaus and libraries reported significant increases in requests for help with self-directed learning projects on family history. Thus, far from competing for students in a finite educational market, educational providers in the learning society are actually creating new demands for their services.

The bad news is that the educational gap between the well educated and the poorly educated in this nation is increasing. Research is clear in documenting the fact that adult education, viewed as the sum total of all organized learning opportunities for adults, serves largely the privileged classes. As a group, today's adult learners are disproportionately young, white, well-educated, and making good salaries. Furthermore, the situation with respect to equal opportunity is becoming worse for all groups except women. The greatest increases in educational participation between 1969 and 1975 were made by white women with college degrees and family incomes of $25,000 a year and over. The rate of growth for women was more than double that for men; adult learning activities for the college educated increased twice as fast as for high school graduates; and the participation for whites increased eight times as fast as that for blacks (Boaz, 1978)

Thus not only are white, well-educated people with good jobs already overrepresented on the adult education scene, they are making much faster progress than their less well-educated peers, and the educational gap between the "haves" and "have nots" is increasing.

There are many things that can and should be done to encourage the participation of those who stand to gain the most from further education--better information about available opportunities, convenient and effective educational and career counseling for adults, equity in financial aid, and more job-relevant education--to cite a few of the more prominent proposals. While these steps may be desirable, they seem to me to ignore the fundamental importance of personal motivation. It is reasonable to suggest that the same factors that led to the early school leaving of the poorly educated are responsible for their reluctance to return.

The other two elements of the UNESCO definition are equally important, namely the development of self-directed learners and the full utilization of the multiple learning resources of the community. The multiple learning resources of the learning society are a reality of the 1980s that few academics are even aware of. The education budgets of some businesses dwarf those of major universities. Last year AT&T spent 900 million dollars on the education of its employees, compared to about 200 million dollars spent by MIT. An engineer at AT&T with Masters degrees in applied mechanics and electrical engineering described his life in the learning society this way, "I'm forty-five, and I don't think there have been more than two or three of my adult life when I haven't taken classes" (Luxemberg, 1978/79).

Having made the point, I hope, that community colleges should view the learning society as a far broader social movement than the "greying of the campus," I want to move to the third element of reform suggested in the UNESCO definition--that men and women should become the "active agents of their own education." By using the term "active agents" UNESCO is not suggesting that learners should become independent of schools and other providers of educational services. Rather they are urging that learners should be encouraged to take a much more active role in the direction and form of their education. There is concern in the United States right now that the new wave of enthusiasm for the education of adults has more to do with the self-serving interests of college administrators and faculty for the protection of academic jobs than with the more altruistic and responsible interests of serving society through the development of self-directing learners. Warren Ziegler (1977, pp. 15-16) a futurist at Syracuse University, deplores what he sees as "a strong trend towards getting more and more citizens to conduct their learning activities within the organizational arrangements of the formal educational system." The point in the learning society, after all, is not to make citizens increasingly dependent on others to tell them what, when and how to learn, but rather to provide the tools and stimulate the desire to become the active agents of their own education.

I have tried to paint with a broad brush the picture of the learning society as I see it emerging in the 1980s. I have suggested that such a picture will demand new responses from community colleges, including the creation of new relationships with other educational providers and with adult learners in the society. But first and foremost, I believe that colleges

will have to give major attention to preparing all students for their future roles as lifelong learners. That requires helping students with three basic understandings: First, students should have some understanding of the future and the certainty that lifelong learning will be a necessity and should be a pleasure. Second, students need to understand themselves as learners; and third, they need to know how to select from multiple options those that are best for them.

Despite twelve years spent in the full-time occupation of learning, college freshmen remain remarkably unsophisticated about what constitutes a good learning experience for them. And adults are not much better as knowledgeable consumers of educational services. College students know little about themselves as learners; they don't know much about the learning options available, and they have little understanding of how to match their learning needs to the available resources. Given the continuing escalation of change, the preparation of college students for their role as lifelong learners is the most important thing they can learn in college.

I find some interesting parallels between what has been happening in the gourmet cooking and dining industry in recent years and what could happen in education were we to develop gourmet learners. By gourmet learners, I mean learners who know good eduation when they see it and who are sufficiently sophisticated to demand innovation and improvement. It is undeniable, I think, that knowledgeable consumers represent one of the most effective routes to improved quality. The gourmet cooking movement has demanded and received a tremendous response from restauranteurs, manufacturers of cooking equipment, cooking schools, and publishers of specialized cookbooks and magazines dealing with everything from artichokes to wines.

Without question, knowledgeable cooks with developed tastes have stimulated the economy of the cooking and dining industry. The more people know about foods, cooking,and nutrition, the more imaginative and responsive the industry must become. Were we really about the business of developing gourmet learners and responding to their needs we would not be worrying about survival. While some college teachers insist that nothing will ever replace the standard classroom lecture as sound and efficient pedagogical technique, that is a little like saying that nothing will ever replace meat and potatoes as the standard American diet. Tastes do develop and change, and as people are exposed to alternatives, whether in diet or in education, large numbers are likely to find something that suits their particular needs better than the standard fare.

But let's face it, most learners whether traditional eighteen year olds or nontraditional forty year olds, are not gourmet learners. And educators must assume some responsibility for the lack of good taste in learning experiences that seems to predominate in today's market. Perhaps that is one reason for the growing concern about quality in education today. If learners don't know good education from bad, they must be protected through regulation, and there are many efforts now to bring so-called nontraditional alternatives for adults under closer regulation. To deal with the immediate problem that may be necessary, but in the long run the development of sophisticated consumers of lifelong learning will enrich the lives of individuals, improve the services of educational providers, and contribute to the full development of the learning society. Community colleges are in the forefront of the lifelong learning movement, already serving people of all ages and from all walks of life with a wide variety of programs and services

Perhaps it is not too much to hope that gourmet learners can do as much to challenge the educational industry to high levels of production and quality as gourmet cooks have done to stimulate the market and the imagination of the cooking and dining industry.

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